

Report To:	COVID-19 RESPONSE AND RECOVERY SCRUTINY PANEL	Date:	6 OCTOBER 2020
Heading:	GUIDANCE UPDATE AND SMALL BUSINESS/HIGH STREET RECOVERY		
Portfolio Holder:	NOT APPLICABLE		
Ward/s:	ALL		
Key Decision:	NO		
Subject to Call-In:	NO		

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to present Panel Members with further information regarding small business and high street recovery, which was selected as a focus theme for this meeting as part of the Panel's established work programme. This report will also present the Panel with further information on recently published Government guidance and COVID-19 specific measures.

Recommendation(s)

Members of the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Scrutiny Panel are recommended to:

- a. Note the information contained in this report.
- b. Consider recovery implications for local businesses and high streets.
- c. Provide Cabinet with any comments, concerns, or interim recommendations at the meeting to be held on 13 October 2020.

Reasons for Recommendation(s)

The established COVID-19 Response and Recovery Scrutiny Panel ensures that dedicated and robust arrangements are in place for this unprecedented situation where the Council must ensure it performs a leading role in supporting communities, businesses and employees.

Alternative Options Considered

No alternative options have been considered.

Detailed Information

COVID-19 Surveillance Report in Nottinghamshire – 20 September

Nottinghamshire County Council's Performance, Intelligence and Policy Team compile a weekly COVID-19 Surveillance Report in Nottinghamshire, based on data sourced from Public Health England. These weekly reports have been compiled from the 21 February 2020 through to 20 September 2020.

The report summarises the information from the surveillance system which is used to monitor the cases of COVID-19 in Nottinghamshire County (excluding Nottingham City). Data includes lab-confirmed positive cases of COVID-19 from pillar 1 (NHS hospital and Public Health England laboratories) and pillar 2 (commercial partner laboratories) of the Government's testing programme.

In the 20 September 2020 report, cumulative data from 21 February to 20 September indicates the following number of confirmed cases in Nottinghamshire County (excluding Nottingham City):

	Pillar 1 + 2 Cases	Pillar 1 Cases	Pillar 2 Cases
Ashfield	713	257	456
Bassetlaw	702	286	416
Broxtowe	598	251	347
Gedling	475	235	240
Mansfield	475	155	320
Newark & Sherwood	534	189	345
Rushcliffe	529	217	312

As indicated in the surveillance report, Ashfield has the highest number of cumulative cases in Nottinghamshire County (excluding Nottingham City). However, the report also sets out that Ashfield is below the average rate of cumulative cases per 100,000 population in England.

For full details of all the COVID-19 Surveillance Reports in Nottinghamshire, please visit Nottinghamshire County Council's website at:

<https://www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/care/coronavirus/local-outbreak-plan/weekly-covid-19-surveillance-report-for-notts>.

Government Guidance and COVID-19 Measures

Guidance and Support

On 22 September, the Government announced further national measures to address rising cases of coronavirus in England.

The following key behaviours were set out:

- **HANDS** – Wash your hands regularly and for at least 20 seconds.
- **FACE** – Cover your face in enclosed spaces, especially where social distancing may be difficult and where you will come into contact with people you do not normally meet.
- **SPACE** -Stay 2 metres apart where possible, or 1 metre with extra precautions in place.

Further guidance was also issued regarding face coverings, working from home, businesses, and meeting people safely.

Face Coverings

- Customers in private hire vehicles and taxis must wear face coverings (from 23 September).
- Customers in hospitality venues must wear face coverings, except when seated at a table to eat or drink. Staff in hospitality and retail will now also be required to wear face coverings (from 24 September).
- People who are already exempt from the existing face covering obligations, such as because of an underlying health condition, will continue to be exempt from these new obligations.
- Guidance stating that face coverings and visors should be worn in close contact services will now become law (from 24 September).
- Staff working on public transport and taxi drivers will continue to be advised to wear face coverings.

Working from Home

To help contain the virus, office workers who can work effectively from home should do so over the winter. Where an employer, in consultation with their employee, judges an employee can carry out their normal duties from home they should do so. Public sector employees working in essential services, including education settings, should continue to go into work where necessary. Anyone else who cannot work from home should go to their place of work. The risk of transmission can be substantially reduced if COVID-19 secure guidelines are followed closely. Extra consideration should be given to those people at higher risk.

Businesses

- Businesses selling food or drink (including cafes, bars, pubs, and restaurants), social clubs, casinos, bowling alleys, amusement arcades (and other indoor leisure activities or facilities), funfairs, theme parks, adventure parks and activities, and bingo halls must be closed between 10pm and 5am. This will include takeaways, but delivery services can continue after 10pm (from 24 September).
- In licensed premises, food and drink must be ordered from, and served at, a table.
- Customers must eat and drink at a table in any premises selling food and drink to consume on site (from 24 September).

- Businesses will need to display the official NHS QR code posters so that customers can 'check-in' at different premises using this option as an alternative to providing their contact details once the app is rolled out nationally (from 24 September).
- Businesses and organisations will face stricter rules to make their premises COVID secure (from 28 September):
 - A wider range of leisure and entertainment venues, services provided in community centres, and close contact services will be subject to the COVID-19 secure requirements in law and fines of up to £10,000 for repeated breaches.
 - Employers must not knowingly require or encourage someone who is being required to self-isolate to come into work.
 - Businesses must remind people to wear face coverings when mandated.

Meeting People Safely

- Support groups must be limited to a maximum of 15 people (from 24 September).
- Indoor organised sport for over 18s will no longer be exempt from the rule of six. There is an exemption for indoor organised team sports for disabled people (from 24 September).
- There will be a new exemption in those areas of local intervention where household mixing is not allowed to permit friends and family to provide informal childcare for children under 14 (from 24 September).
- Weddings and civil partnership ceremonies and receptions will be restricted to a maximum of 15 people (down from 30). Other significant standalone life events will be subject to the 'rule of six' limits, except funerals (from 28 September).

Government has announced an initial £60 million to support additional enforcement activity by local authorities and the police, in addition to funding that has already been awarded.

The spread of the virus is also affecting the ability to reopen business conferences, exhibition halls and large sporting events. This will not be done from 1 October.

The Government's expectation is the measures described above will need to remain in place until March.

Winter Economy Plan

On 24 September, the Government published a new policy paper titled 'Winter Economy Plan'. The Plan introduces a package of targeted measures in response to the current economic context, designed to enable businesses to protect jobs and manage finances in the face of reduced or uncertain demand.

The Plan includes:

- Support for businesses to bring people back to work and save jobs with a new Job Support Scheme and an extension to the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme.

- Help for the hospitality and tourism sectors through a continuation of the reduction in VAT
- Support for over 1 million businesses to relieve pressure on their finances and cashflow through an extension to the application period for four government-backed loans schemes, and changes to the terms of repayment for Bounce Back Loans and Coronavirus Business Interruption Loans.
- New payment schemes to ease the burden of paying deferred VAT and Self-Assessment tax liabilities.

NHS COVID-19 App

On 24 September, the NHS COVID-19 App was launched in England and Wales, designed as the fastest way to see if you're at risk from coronavirus.

The App has several features:

- **Trace:** find out when you've been near other app users who have tested positive for coronavirus.
- **Alert:** lets you know the level of coronavirus risk in your postcode district.
- **Check-in:** get alerted if you've visited a venue where you may have come into contact with coronavirus, using a simple QR code scanner.
- **Symptoms:** check if you have coronavirus symptoms and see if you need to order a test.
- **Test:** helps you order a test if you need to.
- **Isolate:** keep track of your self-isolation countdown and access relevant advice.

Local Restrictions Support Grant

On 9 September, the Government announced new grants for businesses affected by local lockdowns. The Local Restrictions Support Grant is designed to provide a safety net to further protect jobs where a business is required to close due to lockdown restrictions. This grant comes in addition to other existing loans, grants and tax breaks.

Business in England required to close due to local lockdowns or targeted restrictions will now be able to receive grants worth up to £1,500 every three weeks. To be eligible for the grant, a business must have been required to close due to local COVID-19 restrictions. Larger businesses will receive £1,500 every three weeks they are required to close, with smaller businesses receiving £1,000.

Guidance has been published to support local authorities in administering Local Restrictions Support Grants. The produced guidance includes further information on:

- How the grants will be provided
- How much funding to be provided
- Eligibility
- Funding criteria

Small Business and High Street Recovery

In developing the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Scrutiny Panel work programme, Members agreed to extending an invitation to a broad range of businesses that covers the four main areas within the District.

Members of the Panel recognise that to fully understand the impact of COVID-19 and consider appropriate actions for recovery, speaking to business representatives is key.

Maintaining an on-going dialogue with the local business community addressing changes in national and local guidance, trading difficulties, health and safety guidelines and longer term impacts, will enhance creative discussions on support and recovery.

In discussing the issue with local businesses, Members are interested in considering how additional actions put into place by businesses impact both day to day trading and longer term future. This includes consideration of:

- Risk
- Social distancing for both staff and customers
- Cleaning the workplace
- PPE
- Workforce Management
- Who should go to work
- Financial impact
- Support

Economic Recovery Plan

This Economic Recovery Plan outlines the latest real time data to help understand the significant impacts that the Covid-19 pandemic and associated economic disruption is having upon Ashfield's economy. It provides a 'point-in-time' analysis that should be reviewed and updated on an ongoing basis to reflect the unfolding economic situation, emerging impacts locally, and the effects of national recovery policy and interventions.

The analysis emphasizes the severity of disruption to day-to-day operations being experienced by the District's business base, as well as the negative impact that the pandemic is having on sales/revenues and future orders. Over 30% (17,700) of Ashfield's working residents have been furloughed through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, and while local unemployment has risen sharply, it is likely to increase further later this year as this financial subsidy is withdrawn by government. Visits to retail, recreation and workplace venues are still significantly lower than 'normal', posing economic challenges for Kirkby and Sutton Town Centres, whilst depression and mental wellbeing represent a further risk to the District's future recovery.

We know that so far, the impact on individual sectors has varied significantly reflecting the extent to which lockdown measures have forced some industries to temporarily 'shut down'. Just over 20% of Ashfield's local employment, output and business base fall within sectors at highest risk from short term economic harm from Covid-19 which is relatively low and reflects the low reliance on sectors such as hospitality and recreation. However, these are still important sectors for the District, whilst Ashfield faces continued structural vulnerability due to its continued reliance on Manufacturing, which continues to struggle. The substantial numbers of public sector workers will help insulate Ashfield to an extent in the short-to-medium term, as will significant developments in the pipeline

such as Summit Park logistics, which demonstrate that if high quality development opportunities are provided, Ashfield's future remains bright.

In this regard, a number of scenarios continue to emerge to consider the potential short and longer term impacts of Covid-19 upon the economy and these should be treated with caution given the greater than usual uncertainty. Experian's latest projections imply a short term economic impact equivalent to £433 million and 2,500 jobs across the Borough during 2020, taking at least 2-3 years for the local economy to recover to pre Covid-19 levels of economic activity.

The analysis of emerging economic impacts presented in this Plan therefore raises a number of implications for the Route Map to address:

- The 'real time' nature of the evolving economic situation emphasises the need to keep on top of data and intelligence as it emerges, to monitor impacts as they unfold, and use this to review the strategy response on a timely basis. The short term effects of Covid-19 will already have altered Ashfield's local business base, creating a new 'baseline', and we are unlikely to see the full scale of impact until later in the year when key subsidy schemes such as the JRS are withdrawn.
- Economic recovery should represent the over-riding short term focus for ADC, identifying initial priorities, actions and interventions to guide business resilience and economic restoration over the first few years of the strategy period. The Route Map must distinguish between existing interventions that can be accelerated to support the recovery response versus bespoke interventions to tackle Covid-19 specific circumstances and challenges. This should also consider the scope to fast track existing projects to 'shovel ready' status to take advantage of current government funding opportunities, such as the Maid Marian Line.
- Whilst economic scenarios will continue to emerge to consider the potential short and longer term impacts of Covid-19, the significant uncertainty underlines the need for the route map to be flexible in order to respond rapidly to locally relevant risk factors and outcomes, for instance local lockdowns, worsening mental health data, or the underperformance of key industrial clusters.
- ADC must not lose sight of longer term economic growth aspirations as short term recovery responses are prepared and implemented. Whilst some existing strategic commitments will inevitably need to be re-prioritised in light of Covid-19 to reflect short term challenges, others will still remain relevant albeit may need to be adjusted to reflect a 'new normal'.
- The clear sector dimension to Covid-19 impacts so far underlines the need for a strong sectoral approach within the Route Map, to ensure that adequate resources are focused towards those parts of the District's business base facing the most acute challenges, but also to enable Ashfield to capitalise on growth and innovation opportunities around digital transformation or leverage existing assets to contribute to the Government's 'Build, Build, Build' and green recovery agendas.

Emerging Themes to Guide Local Economic Recovery

1. **Town Centre Recovery:** Boost local consumer demand and confidence by promoting Ashfield District as a great place to live and visit. Attract spending back to Kirkby-in-Ashfield and Sutton Town Centres through promotional activity, local purchasing campaigns and community projects. This could involve the Council working with local partners to implement

an 'open for business' campaign to publicise businesses, offers and events as town centre businesses gradually re-open.

- 2. Regeneration Capacity Building:** This would need to include a Full Time Regeneration Team for ADC tasked with producing a new Economic Development Strategy. New Dedicated Capacity Building and leveraging of the Council's own dedicated resources to instigate a full time Regeneration Team for Ashfield District capable of delivering and taking forward its own Economic Development Strategy for the District. This could involve progressing a wider Place Marketing campaign to encourage a broader range of developers and investors to come back to Ashfield. This would involve the new Regeneration Team marketing the District's assets effectively to developers and housebuilders more generally and promote Ashfield as a place for aspiring households to move to.
- 3. Skills and Training:** By working with local education and training providers, the D2N2 LEP and others to ensure that local residents –in particular young people - can access skills and employability support including specific opportunities for re-training, business start-up, and developing digital/e-commerce competencies.
- 4. Industrial Sectoral Support:** As Ashfield's business base transitions from restart, to recover, to renew, this should include a locally-responsive business resilience programme with targeted support to enable firms to adapt to new technologies (such as enhancing digital and e-commerce capabilities), diversify or access new markets (including exporting opportunities) and support business start-ups amongst residents re-entering the labour market as a result of Covid-19.
- 5. Green Business Growth:** This would involve harnessing innovation 'Green Recovery' opportunities generated by the pandemic (such as medical technology and clean growth), using these to accelerate existing business clusters, development proposals and local business ecosystems, particularly where these align with Government economic recovery funding initiatives.
- 6. Development and Infrastructure Projects:** This would aim to kick start investment and stimulate economic activity within the District, engaging with key partners such as the LEP to leverage funding opportunities from emerging funding packages such as the Getting Building Fund. This would include progressing opportunities such as the Maid Marian Line Rail Extension to the proposed HS2 Hub at Toton; the new Garden settlement(s); and the opportunities emerging from the Towns Fund and Future High Streets fund proposals.
- 7. Supporting Ashfield's Residents and Workforce:** The Pandemic may create a significant mental health crisis for Ashfield's residents due to heightened levels of anxiety due to the risk of catching the infection, disrupted education, lost jobs/income, dying or losing family members. From an economic perspective, this theme would include ADC working with the NHS Nottingham City CCG to ensure widespread availability of mental health and psychosocial support and to assist residents to overcome financial difficulties and to come out of debt and re-enter the workforce.

Implications

Corporate Plan:

As part of the recovery phase, the Corporate Plan has been reviewed to take account of the impacts of COVID-19 and with a forward look to potential recovery plans. The refreshed Corporate Plan was approved at the July 21 meeting of Cabinet.

The refreshed Corporate Plan sets out the three main National recovery themes of Health Recovery, Economic Recovery, and Social and Community Recovery. The Council's two main strands of recovery are:

Ashfield as a Place – Community and Economic Recovery

Supporting the community and businesses in achieving stability and a new normality following COVID-19., assisting in rebuilding, restoring, and rehabilitating the community's emotional, social, economic, and physical wellbeing.

The Council – Organisational Recovery

Assessing the impact of COVID-19 on Council services, finances, and employees, and planning for future financial resilience and how the Council may need to operate differently.

Local recovery themes have been identified through the refreshed Corporate Plan:

External Housing and Communities

- Health and Happiness:
 - Building on humanitarian work with the Community and Voluntary Sector.
 - Re-introduction of events when safe to do so.
 - Ensuring workplace health.
- Homes and Housing:
 - Reviewing the Homelessness Strategy to understand the impact of COVID-19.
- Cleaner and Greener:
 - Delivering the 'Bag It' campaign.
 - Safe re-opening of park buildings.
- Safer and Stronger:
 - Providing refuge accommodation for victims in abusive relationships.
 - Raising awareness of domestic abuse and ensuring support is provided to victims.

External Economy and Place Finance

- Economic Growth and Place:
 - Opening the District's Town Centres safely and in accordance with COVID-19 Secure guidelines.
 - Ensuring eligible businesses receive COVID-19 grant support funding.
 - Ensuring transport is safe.

Internal Council Services

- Innovate and Improve:
 - Fast tracking the digital transformation delivery to improve accessibility and online capability, centred on the customer.
 - Supporting employees to increase digital skills.
 - Working in partnership to increase digital inclusion across the District.
 - Enabling employees, where appropriate and relevant, to work from home, having adequate digital tools and equipment, and a safe working environment.

- Ensuring employee wellbeing at home or when returning to the workplace.

Legal:

Legal: Ashfield District Council is a statutory Category One Responder under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and works with multi agency partners through the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire LRF when dealing with Major Incidents.

Emergency and Urgent Decision powers are set out in the Council’s Constitution as outlined above.

Emergency Financial Decisions:

- Urgent Decisions outside the Budget or Policy Framework (Part 4 of the Constitution)
The Executive, the Leader or Portfolio Holder or Chief Officers may take a decision which is contrary to the Council’s policy framework or contrary to or not wholly in accordance with the budget approved by Council if the decision is urgent. A decision is urgent if: a) It is not practical to convene a quorate meeting of the Council; and b) The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agrees that the decision is urgent.
- **Section 138 Local Government Act 1972**
Where an emergency or disaster involving destruction of or danger to life or property occurs, is imminent or there is reasonable ground for expecting such an emergency or disaster and it is likely to affect the whole or part of the District or its residents, the Council may: a) Incur such expenditure as they consider necessary in taking action themselves; and b) Make grants or loans to other persons or bodies on conditions determined by the Council in respect of any such action taken by those persons or bodies.

Coronavirus Act 2020 received Royal Assent on 25 March 2020. The Act has extensive schedules setting out a wide range of powers giving a framework to life under lockdown. Regulations have underpinned the details of the framework.

Finance:

Budget Area	Implication
General Fund – Revenue Budget	Financial implications and projections of impact and recovery as a result of the pandemic are detailed in the report.
General Fund – Capital Programme	
Housing Revenue Account – Revenue Budget	
Housing Revenue Account – Capital Programme	

Risk:

Risk	Mitigation
The Council’s Corporate Risk Register has been reviewed to	Monitoring and updating the COVID-19 related risks through the Council’s existing Corporate Risk

take account of impacts and increased risks as a result of COVID-19.	Management processes and through the work of the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Scrutiny Panel.
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Human Resources:

Advice and guidance has been provided to employees throughout the pandemic based on government guidance.

Environmental/Sustainability

The COVID-19 lockdown period led to an unprecedented reduction in CO2 emissions and a huge improvement in air quality. The challenge for the recovery phase is how to urgently restart the District's economy to protect the income and livelihoods of people whilst striving to capitalise on some of the positive environmental benefits enjoyed during the COVID-19 lockdown period and enable positive behaviour change that endures for the long term.

Equalities:

Equality impact assessments will be undertaken as part of the recovery phase when considering policy development/changes or service delivery changes.

Other Implications:

None.

Reason(s) for Urgency

None.

Reason(s) for Exemption

None.

Background Papers

- Ashfield District Council, *Draft Ashfield District Economic Recovery Plan*, August 2020.
- Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, *Local Restrictions Support Grant: Guidance for Local Authorities*, September 2020.
- HM Treasury, *Winter Economy Plan*, September 2020.

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